Media Assistance: Best Practices and Priorities

Report on a USAID Workshop

PPC EVALUATION WORKING PAPER NO. 4

Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination
November 2003

PN-ACR-754

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Media Assistance: Best Practices and Priorities (PN-ACR-754)

Journalism Training and Institution Building in Central American Countries (PN-ACR-755)

Assessment of USAID Media Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1996–2002 (PN-ACR-756)

Promoting Independent Media in Russia: An Assessment of USAID's Media Assistance (PN-ACR-757)

U.S. Media Assistance Programs in Serbia, July 1997–June 2002 (PN-ACT-553)

USAID's Media Assistance: Policy and Programmatic Lessons (PN-ACU-013)

Media Assistance: Best Practices and Priorities

Report on a USAID Workshop

Ellen Hume

Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination

November 2003

Contents

Preface

USAID organized a dialogue on July 31, 2002, to discuss critical issues in international media assistance. The dialogue was organized around the following themes:

- media assistance, public diplomacy, and national interest
- media training and technical assistance
- issues in the sustainability of independent media
- lessons in building media partnership
- international media assistance and peacebuilding

Distinguished policymakers, heads and representatives of media NGOs, and other experts participated in the dialogue. The discussions were both thoughtful and thought-provoking. Participants shared their own experiences and raised important policy and operational issues about media assistance.

Ellen Hume brilliantly captured the gist of discussions in this report, and I am grateful to her for this effort.

My hope is that this report will be of interest to all those interested in promoting independent media in transition and developing countries.

Krishna Kumar
Senior Social Scientist
USAID

Introduction

USAID's thinking about media development has been influenced by a decade of work in Eastern Europe, where a major focus is providing alternative media in conflict areas and developing nongovernmental, professional media in postcommunist and postconflict settings. Little-known countries are now on the frontlines, offering new challenges.

Determining that the time had come to derive lessons from past efforts, think afresh about media assistance, and perhaps add some new models—including approaches for Africa and Asia, where the cultural preconditions and economic prospects are quite different from those of Europe—USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC) undertook a year-long evaluation and review of USAID's media assistance programs. The goal of the review was to develop a set of learning tools and promote a more aggressive media development agenda.

The media[1] assistance review was launched in July 2002 by PPC's Dr. Krishna Kumar, who convened about 30 USAID and public diplomacy officials, congressional aides, journalists, and NGO media development practitioners to assess what has worked, what has not, and what might be done differently. Much of the discussion focused on the need to create professional, independent media that can give voice to different sectors of society, provide useful information, and hold powerful institutions and individuals accountable.

The candid discussion also revealed areas of tension. Media development practitioners cited tensions arising from the possibility that the goals of public diplomacy were sometimes incompatible with the goals underlying the promotion of the development of independent, indigenous media.

[1] Participants did not define media formally but included newspapers, television, radio, and the internet: all providing forums for discussion, access to information, and voice to citizens. It also referred to journalists.

Another tension related to the competing priorities and methods of media work in conflict zones versus those of long-term media development in more stable developing democracies.

The Relationship Between Media Development, Public Diplomacy, and Public Affairs

When there were no opportunities in communist countries for indigenous or foreign voices to be heard, broadcasts from Radio Free Europe and Voice of America were a lifeline. Traditional public diplomacy and public affairs have always sought to explain U.S. views and culture, with the goal of winning positive international attitudes and reactions to U.S. policy aims. Media development, however, is not about selling specific U.S. policies. It is about creating internal debate and increasing access to information within other countries. It is about training and supporting indigenous, professional media whose first loyalty is to their own citizens rather than to their patrons abroad and at home. The benefits to the United States are less direct but more fundamental and, perhaps, long-lasting. For example, independent media can enable countries to become more democratic and economically stable, and thus pose fewer problems for the United States.

There are some overlaps. Traditional public diplomacy, including the work of the former U.S. Information Service, always included media training and development. The State Department's Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has training programs in all sub-Saharan African countries. The bureau also provides radio vacuum tubes, VCRs, and other small items needed by indigenous journalists. U.S. embassies bring in foreign journalists to inspire and train local media, and various U.S. Government programs invite foreign journalists to the United States. Sometimes, the United States lobbies governments on behalf of a free press or an individual journalist who may have been

persecuted. USAID-sponsored media training, focusing at first on election coverage, became a standard feature of postcommunist development aid.

Modern media capacity building, however, plays a fundamentally different role than that of traditional diplomacy and public affairs. Media development seeks to build effective journalistic capacity within developing democracies. Such development does not necessarily need to be tied to other USAID goals, such as elections, health, or antitrafficking. A vibrant, independent media sector is now considered a worthy development goal by itself.

Participants illuminated the tensions among different approaches to media during the discussion of current efforts to improve the U.S. image in the Muslim world. Some criticized combating anti-Americanism with public relations efforts as possibly counterproductive:

- People in other societies can "smell propaganda much better than we can."
- "Our good intentions to control the messages that go out may work against us."
- "The United States is the net beneficiary of the free flow of ideas. The more we try to control, the more people will resent us."
- "Societies ultimately change from within. We need to help them open the information environment."

Pointing out that the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were incubated in isolated societies, whose closed, officially sanctioned media chose to target the United States rather than their own policy failures, participants stressed that the response to terrorism should be multifaceted. One response would be to "create in those societies moderate voices that have been kept out, in other words, pluralistic media." By supporting the growth of independent media, "we will find that there will be a reduction of terrorism, because these countries will begin to build civil societies that give different ways of solving problems."

Participants underlined that assisted media's editorial independence, from its own government *and* from the U.S. Government, is central to media development. The credibility of the assisted media outlet or journalism community is undermined if it reports only favorably on U.S. policy. These media will be seen as foreign propagandists rather than legitimate local voices. Thus, participants said, U.S. Government program designers have to expect—even hope—that the media they help will be critical at times rather than universally supportive of U.S. policies.

That is not to say that all foreign media should be supported. "We should not be funding Hezbollah TV in Lebanon. We should have transparent standards for what constitutes reliable media organizations," one participant said. "The goal should be the injection of support early, to build an organization that doesn't need us."

A strongly contrarian view was expressed by a government official with senior public diplomacy experience. Skeptical that media development could "reach U.S. objectives without getting into content," he said that in Pakistan, for instance, some of the most virulent anti-U.S. discourse is generated by the relatively free Urdu press. "There are lots and lots of print outlets in Urdu media. The editorial views are hostile. Opening up Pakistan's media is not going to change that." He suggested that, as the Pakistani Government reforms its broadcast licensing procedures, "it will open up opportunities for NGOs to have their own radio broadcasting opportunities. Perhaps even television. Will we have a better situation for U.S. interests? That is not clear." He said that while freedom of the press was good in theory, it was more important to work closely with governments in countries such as India and Pakistan to reduce the anti-U.S. sentiments of the media. "I was appalled by the low priority our [Pakistan] mission had on pressing governments about their public relations about the United States," he concluded. "Opening up and aiding the media through the mechanisms you're talking about here are relatively less important."

A journalist said his own view was "the exact oppo-

site," because "If you're not practicing what you're preaching [about press freedom], it's not going to ring true." Another participant noted that public diplomacy had received far more U.S. Government money than media development, which he said deserved more support. "Nobody is saying either/or. We need to be involved in both," he concluded.

Rationale: Why Is Media Assistance Worthwhile?

Why should U.S. taxpayers support the development of independent-minded foreign journalists, who may turn around and criticize the United States? Why not just stick with traditional public diplomacy, coordinating the U.S. Government's message and focusing on business investment and election support? The answer for most participants was clear: Because today development is a much higher priority for national security, building capacity for independent, professional media is important as an engine of social change and a determinant of economic and political progress. For societies to be self-correcting, they need to engage in public dialogue through media. "You can't develop as a country…if you don't have basic institutions providing transparent, good government," one participant said.

Participants stressed that media are essential to a society's transparency, accountability, information flow, and plurality of voices. U.S. business and foreign policy interests are vulnerable in countries that don't have these elements of civil society. "We found in some areas that people have been starving much more for news and information than elections," said one USAID official.

"Elections and the rule of law are important, but media are an essential element in making those things participatory." These views are reinforced in Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*[2] and The World Bank's *World Development Report 2002*.[3]

[2] Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999.

[3] World Bank. *World Development Report 2002*. Washington, DC: World Bank. 2001.

The latter includes a chapter on the media that argues that a vibrant independent professional media sector is an important factor in a country's economic health, because media affect the incentives of market participants and influence the demand for institutional change.

Media development was also seen as an important but underused tool to prevent conflicts. "We have a wealth of experience in Russia, Asia, and Africa, and [understand] how vital media is in conflict settings. [The media] need to find ways to report on both sides in balanced ways, to have town meeting inputs, etc.," a USAID official said. Media does not get proper attention in foreign policy and development work, according to a media expert. "Only a small number of foundations include media in their work. But what is the force that has the greatest impact on social change in the world? Media. It's ubiquitous. But it's not like the weather: it is something we can create, shape, and produce."

The challenges of successful media development—including training and selection of local partners—warrant much greater coordination, collaboration, and creativity among media assistance practitioners. The case needs to be made in the United States and the world for the long-range media development goal, described by one USAID participant as creating "an indigenous corps of independent reporters who want to do objective work—a professional field."

How Does Media Assistance Relate to Peacebuilding?

A skeptical public diplomacy advocate concluded that the discussion about promoting civil society with independent media development was naïve, because the real reason for such aid is political. For example, the purpose of supporting Serbian independent radio station B92 was not to create independent media as a sustained sector, but to support the U.S. goal of overthrowing a political regime that was fomenting genocide. He noted that even governments that are more

U.S.-friendly may object to "democracy building" when it erodes their authority.

This critique illustrated the need to distinguish between short-term media aid in a conflict setting (such as the former Yugoslavia, where donors supported alternative media in Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere on a crisis basis) and long-term media development in a vulnerable region with smoldering ethnic tensions (such as Pakistan), a postconflict society (Bosnia today), or a developing democracy (such as South Africa). The efforts to foster civil society, including free speech and access to information, require a long-term media development strategy with sustainability as a goal.

Participants agreed that there was no "one size fits all" approach to media development. It has to be tailored to each situation:

- In vulnerable countries where conflict may be imminent, media assistance may focus on supporting a plurality of voices, and journalist training may stress deemphasizing inflammatory coverage.

- In areas of active conflict, alternative media may be supported with short-term grants to provide information and ideas that otherwise would be suppressed. Participants referred to the difficulty of creating credible new media, but cited Serbian Radio B92, supported by a coalition of international donors, as an example of a successful new alternative media outlet that established local credibility.

- In postconflict and developing countries, the goal should be to develop a self-sustaining media sector that is part of the culture of democracy and that supports accountability of other power centers. This goal requires various kinds of training and support, and the promotion of an enabling environment of legal and economic systems. The task should be approached with a long-range plan.

There is a tension between conflict prevention and the development of independent-minded, pluralistic media. The idea of shutting down hate media in Rwanda and Bosnia was defended by some but vigorously opposed by the participating U.S. journalists.

Determining Media Development Needs

Media needs differ according to the society's stage of conflict, whether vulnerable, at war, or postconflict.

Vulnerable Countries

Participants emphasized the importance of building local and regional journalism capacity in vulnerable countries to offset the power of targeted hate messages. "One lesson is [to] get in before the conflict. Concentrate on finding the best partners within an ethnic community. They're not going to have integrated media. Acknowledge you have to find partners in the most hardline areas. They will emerge." The message was to aim training and support at independent media that will think beyond ethnic lines and include divergent viewpoints, as tried in Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia, and Sierra Leone.

Some conflicts "are caused by preventing an ethnic minority access to media." Is it a good idea to create stations that are just for an ethnic minority in their own language? When Armenians in Ngorno-Karabakh had their access cut off, "violence became necessary. Television has become a new locus of sovereignty. If you are cut off from it, you are cut off from security." One technique for preventing such violence is to allow all minorities media access. "IREX and Internews's work in developing pluralistic media is itself a way to prevent conflict." A panel member cited Ashutosh Varshney's recent *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*[4] as an excellent study of why some Indian cities experienced racial riots while others did not. The cities that avoided violence had integrated institutions, which played a key prevention role. Drawing from this, one participant observed that it was good to "create integrated media institutions."

[4] Varshney Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2002.

Sometimes this is impossible, others noted. For instance, trying to find pluralistic media in Bosnia after Croats, Serbs, and Bosnians had been "ethnically cleansed" was extremely difficult.

Countries at War

Societies in conflict need news and special programs, particularly broadcast, that support peacebuilding, dialogue, and information about available humanitarian assistance. During active conflict in Rwanda, Aceh, East Timor, and elsewhere, one violence-reducing project took journalists from both sides out of their respective regions and trained them to report factually "in a way that can lower the temperature" of the coverage and reduce the violence. In another program, Armenians and Azeris engaged in 27 weekly satellite dialogues in both countries. That was the highest rated broadcast program in the region; however, there was no money in the grant for the project to be evaluated. Said one participant, "We did the whole thing, and I can't tell you whether it had any effect or not. It's a shame."

Postconflict Media Development

The participants focused on four issues key to postconflict media development: promoting independent media, bridging ethnic divisions, sustaining development efforts over the long term, and strengthening donor cooperation.

Promoting independent media. Participants agreed it was unreasonable to expect media in a conflict zone to be self-sustaining or fully independent. In a postconflict society, however, media should be weaned off donor support as the appropriate enabling environment emerges. It can take a decade or longer to accomplish this. One practitioner cautioned: "Even in the United States, a startup cable company doesn't expect to turn a profit for at least 10 years."

Bridging ethnic divisions. Even when hostilities are over and a peace agreement signed, ethnic or partisan groups are likely to control indigenous media. To be sustainable, "a media organization has to reach the average person. What if the average person is interested in hearing their enemies excoriated?" a development expert asked. Forcing a media outlet to be multiethnic may not be realistic; it may even be counterproductive.

One attempt to bridge the ethnic divide involved supporting a large number of independent media outlets, as in Bosnia. Peacekeepers may impose a central, monopolistic media system to convey information about the danger of landmines, where to get assistance, and other immediate issues. Eventually, media program designers will try to free up the independent, local media: "In Kosovo, we funded lots of independent media [and] decreased the enforcement. As we made the system freer, we had more and more journalists say, 'Do you realize the dangerous thing you're doing? We hate each other.' They didn't understand the conflict of ideas."

Sustaining development efforts over the long term. Participants agreed that crisis intervention is difficult to sustain. The discussion built a case for more effective preconflict work, including long-term media development that addressed plurality, professionalism, and media independence. USAID generally spends no more than five to seven years in a postconflict country. A study by New York University found that nearly 50 percent of pledges made in peace accords are never fulfilled. At the same time, 50 percent of civil wars that are halted restart within five to seven years. Many countries go back and forth, in and out of war: "Countries like Nigeria are equally vulnerable [to civil war] even though democratized…. No wonder that OTI [USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives], which has thought of itself as working on a two-year schedule, finds itself returning to countries, such as Congo and Angola, as conflicts wax and wane. We maybe need to think of this kind of [postwar] assistance in a preconflict way so there is a pressure valve in allowing these conflicts to be aired," one participant suggested.

Strengthening donor cooperation. The international community, including USAID, needs to be prepared to cooperate more effectively in media development. In Serbia, international coordination was the key. It provided continuity as the situation

changed. "It's not as if U.S. policy didn't gyrate. We went from dancing with Milosevic to indicting him!" "We need to find some kind of platform for continual discussion, even when there is no hotspot. We need to talk about donor dependence," one international media practitioner said. Periodic meetings to share best practices, form coalitions, and address common regional or thematic media development issues would be useful. Independent media capacity could be supported diplomatically by U.S. policymakers in head-to-head discussions with foreign leaders. "Conditionality within the World Bank would be more effective than what NGOs could do," one NGO executive said.

"It is the failure of the preceding peace that causes the next war," a media development expert concluded. "The solution to war is to fix peace. Building up civil societies. Healthy civil societies don't have ethnic conflict. When former U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross was asked if he made a mistake, he said 'We made one mistake. We didn't deal with the local media.'"

Media Assistance Issues

Donor Coordination

Participants agreed on the importance of better donor coordination. More communication, planning, and collaboration among USAID and other media assistance organizations—including foreign counterparts to USAID and private NGOs—would help everyone. For example, in Serbia, international donors worked together effectively on media that challenged Milosevic's restrictions.

Joint operations reduce redundancy, capture valuable experience, and protect the credibility of the individuals and organizations being helped. One pointed to the Serbia experience: "Policy coordination and cofunding…actually gave the serious media development people allies [and] cover, and helped mightily to answer the problem of whether Soros or the Germans are 'buying the media.' When Milosevic wanted to shut down the independent media center, he had to go against the whole international community." Once the Milosevic regime changed, however, the various media development institutions began pursuing different policies, and coordination suffered.

Participants deemed a collaborative approach particularly important in the Middle East, where U.S. citizens are targets of decades of anti-U.S. propaganda. Middle Easterners need real information, not more propaganda, some participants said. "You cannot begin doing media assistance in the Muslim world without an [international] consortium. The U.S. Government cannot do it alone."

Regional organizations may offer an opportunity for more strategic use of various donor contributions. Examples cited included CELAP (the Center for Latin American Journalism), which emerged from a USAID journalism training project in Latin America, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, which serves many southern African countries with help from multiple donors.

Several problems confront USAID as it attempts to improve donor coordination: limited funding by other international donors, few organizations with pertinent expertise, rigid donor management structures and assessment requirements, and lack of a political constituency in the United States for media assistance.

Better coordination within the U.S. Government and among its media development grantees is also needed. One participant suggested that the U.S. Government create one "go to" office for long-term media aid and immediate journalist crisis assistance. There was no consensus on where such an office should be placed bureaucratically. Participants widely supported a suggestion to train ambassadors about supporting USAID's work, including promoting independent media. The training should clarify the difference between traditional public diplomacy and public relations, and the development of independent, indigenous professional journalism practices.

Building Local Partnerships

Selecting local partners, which needs to occur at the outset of a media project, is perhaps the most

important step in the process of media development. "What development means is change. It does have to come from within," one media development expert emphasized.

Participants underlined that indigenous partners should take the lead. The role of the international community is to help enlarge the space in which these media outlets operate. Thus, the needs of the local partners should dictate the nature of the assistance. If they need transmitters or presses, the international community should make them available.

It is an "art" to identify local partners who will fight for professional standards that serve the public's interest against the corrupt and inept. The levels of conflict in a society will influence the choice of the most appropriate local partners. Suggestions for selecting appropriate local partners included the following:

- Forming a consortium of media development organizations, including legal defense groups, and getting from them a short list of organizations and outlets to support in a given country or region.
- Bringing together distinguished journalists from the United States and elsewhere to evaluate applications.
- Investing in "journalism communities" rather than individual media outlets. A European media trainer suggested: "We work with observatories as a way to form communities of journalists, so that the media polices itself. This avoids the issue of unbalancing newspaper and radio stations one over the other."
- Making sure that the local partners are respected professionally.
- Getting the "technocrats" involved to avoid having the development practitioners targeted as political activists or partisans.

Participants also debated the idea of funding programming rather than media outlets. Voice of America and Radio Free Europe offer programming; Common Ground Productions, Internews, and other U.S. Government grantees create programming with local media. Participants agreed that creating programming with indigenous partners can be part of the training exercise, but there is a need to leave behind outlets that will carry this appropriate programming on their own.

Sustainability

A central goal of media assistance is for the media to become self-sustaining. Otherwise, the media will find it difficult to maintain editorial independence. One participant noted that establishing self-sustaining, independent media outlets is never fully achieved but is a never-ending process. Viability always has to be nurtured, developed, and promoted. This is why a long-term development commitment by USAID and others is more effective than one-off grants and training programs.

Economic strength, participants agreed, is at the heart of the challenge of media development: without it an independent news organization can't fight improper political or economic pressures, and "all the watchdogs in the world can't help." Sustainability depends on economic independence; it also depends on factors such as legal support and the transparency of the political system. It is thus helpful to coordinate media development with other elements of democracy-building. Some suggested that funding for media assistance could come from economic development budgets, as well as from democracy-building funds.

Many participants suggested the need for greater flexibility in defining sustainability. Advertising and business investment in media have not developed as needed to support independent media in many postcommunist and economically vulnerable societies. Dependence on donors remains a big problem. The emphasis on creating independent media outlets remains vitally important, but it may not be realistic or productive in many places.

There was a lively discussion about what it means for a media outlet to be independent. Participants agreed that the "reformed" government media in

Eastern Europe are generally not yet successfully serving the public's interest with editorially independent news and information. Advertising revenue does not ensure independence in a country where ads are a form of political patronage, one participant noted. Even the purely commercial independent media may not offer an ideal model because some drop news entirely, as Radio Plus did in Kosovo.

Even having a media sector that is politically independent of the government and economically self-sustaining may not satisfy media development objectives, which include instilling a sense of mission to serve the public with news and information and presenting diverse opinions and voices. In Mongolia, some independent media undermined democracy, one participant observed. In some cases, quasigovernmental media may be preferable if editorially independent of their governments (as are U.S. public television and radio, the BBC, and others) and if better than purely commercial media in giving space to professional news and a plurality of voices.

Participants also discussed the market distortion that arises from U.S. investment in some media over others: "We cannot be seen as bringing Wal-Mart to these countries and rolling over the indigenous boutique media, which will go out of business." "We will be seen merely as a program to introduce large U.S. and European media into those markets." To address this, some media development experts said they focus on training and supporting a "community of journalists" and a "culture" of professional journalism. This approach offers fairness and leads to beneficial results, particularly when owners and managers or the political environment are hostile to professional journalism. The decision to support a media outlet or a journalistic community clearly depends on the context.

Training

Media development generally includes training journalists inside or outside the country about professional norms and practices. Although a journalist's media outlet might thwart efforts to offer professional, independent content, the journalist may eventually move to another job or work within the existing one to moderate partisan messages. "Building institutions is never as important as training people," one U.S. official said.

Another participant disagreed: "Everybody loves training because it is politically very easy to do, but it ignores the structural issues." Bringing foreign journalists to the United States for training has its virtues, but it is difficult to sustain because it costs $80,000 to $90,000 to train one person for a few years, he said. Another problem is that better-educated trainees may be reluctant to return home. The trend now is for U.S. media development programs to use fewer U.S. citizens and more indigenous trainers who work within the target country.

The discussion provided some suggestions for effective journalism training:

- Training should cover both professional values and ethics and practical, technical advice.
- There should be strings attached: people who attend seminars should be required to take part in followup surveys, seminars, and reunions, and to transmit their knowledge to others.
- It isn't a good idea to force training on a reluctant organization or individual. Cross-platform training (including internet, broadcast, and print) offers an opportunity to lure reluctant managers and governments to accept broader training in professionalism, ethics, and journalistic practice.
- Legal support and training are critical. Most journalists are not familiar with local or international media laws.
- Use indigenous and crossborder trainers when appropriate.
- It is important to employ various types of training: short workshops, long-term immersion training, practical advice, grants, travel to the United States or other regions, and opportunities to produce cooperative stories.

- More up-to-date training materials and books are needed virtually everywhere, but particularly in Africa.

Training at an organization whose managers are not committed to the same values may be a waste of time and money, several participants said. One way to address this problem is to involve the managers and, where feasible, the owners in the training. This has helped in some Latin American settings. Buy-in from the managers also helps extend the training of individuals to others. Where this seems impossible, the lure of technical internet training may still open some doors. This is true in China, for example, where media training might otherwise be forbidden.

Participants expressed concern that training might be wasted if autocratic governments or corrupt media owners make it impossible to practice what had been learned. Most argued that training journalists—even in inhospitable settings—was worth the investment over the long term. Journalists might not be allowed to practice their new professional standards and ethics in their current jobs or political environments. But offering training in postconflict societies should be the beginning of a long-term relationship.

Participants stressed the importance of creating journalistic networks and a "community" of journalists with similar professional values. This is a necessary part of creating civil society, even if it proceeds incrementally and slowly. Professionalized journalists may look for opportunities to inform the public in creative ways. In Russia, for example, the trained journalists who now must work for oligarchs are a "fifth column," seeking opportunities to bend the rules and report important stories. In the Czech Republic, if local journalists can't break a story because their managers won't let them, they leak it to foreign journalists and then quote the foreign report in their own newspapers and broadcasts.

Training may be especially useful in societies characterized by relatively free, but unprofessional and divisive, media. "How [we] get an Urdu language journalist to put out a message that is balanced and informative is a matter of training," one participant noted. "That local voice is going to transform countries that are not democracies—that are closed—into open societies."

Plurality of Voices

Supporting the development of indigenous media that can offer a variety of opinions and draw on a cross section of a region's peoples is one of the most important goals of media assistance. Pluralism in media tends to have a moderating influence on the political scene and can help prevent local conflicts from developing into major internal wars. It is vital, participants argued, to support the "moderate voices that have been kept out," and media constitute a relatively efficient and low-cost way to do this. In many cases, these moderate voices and opinions have been suppressed by the government; the resulting resentment has grown into civil instability. Providing the checks and balances of competing views and the legitimacy of a public platform can also reduce the appeal of hate media such as Rwanda's Radio Milles Collines.

Participants stressed the need for some donor flexibility to emphasize "plurality of views" rather than "objectivity." "People who want to impose American standards may expect too much, considering conditions in some of these countries," said one. Instead of finding a neutral official voice for news—the U.S. tradition—these media may be effective in engaging the public if they respectfully present a range of local opinions. These media not only can provide opportunities for women, minorities, and others to be heard, but they improve the opportunities for public debate.

What if media development merely prepares the way for foreign investors to take over an indigenous newspaper or broadcaster? This may not be bad, a participant said, as "foreign investment doesn't necessarily snuff out indigenous voices."

Promoting Media in Poor Countries

The present measures of success in media development—such as number of journalists trained, media outlets equipped and set up, and "independent"

media in continuing operation—don't necessarily work for the poorest countries. In Africa, for example, there is little private investment in media. In places like Sierra Leone, an energetic individual may sustain a community radio news operation by selling birth, death, and birthday announcements, but only the government-run radio station reaches the whole country. In such places grants for media development might be especially appropriate.

Some participants talked about being open to a "third way," a mixture of public and private funding similar to U.S. public radio and television systems. Quasigovernmental media are tending now to fall back under autocratic government control in Eastern Europe, one participant asserted, but others said that elsewhere editorial independence may let such media become a vibrant part of civil society.

One program designer suggested that perhaps corporations doing extractive business in Africa could contribute, along with other donors, to a pool of money to fund community radio and other media. Operating like the U.S. Corporation for Public Broadcasting, this third-way model is particularly appealing for very poor countries that are unlikely to attract media investment money.

Assessment and Other Challenges

Participants underlined the need for a meaningful way of assessing media development-beyond just "numbers trained." Empowering journalists, for instance, may not be as easily measured as are the results of more traditional USAID health, population, and agriculture programs. However, winning funding will be difficult unless clearer assessment benchmarks are devised. A further problem is that evaluation money is the first to be cut from a grant.

Other challenges referred to by the participants included the following:

- *USAID bureaucracy.* USAID's management structure is not as nimble as it should be. OTI has helped cut through the bureaucracy, but the short timeframe of its assistance is still a problem.

- *No U.S. constituency.* There is no domestic constituency for developing democracy, including the independent media sector. "We need a constituency in the United States that understands the work we are doing." Indeed, most people in the United States take a free press for granted and are accustomed to sunshine laws, the Freedom of Information Act, and other means of getting information about government actions.

- *Pace of policy change.* U.S. policy may change every few years, making it difficult to commit to long-term programs and goals.

Hallmarks of Effective Media Assistance

Participants shared ideas about the hallmarks of effective media assistance, which included building flexibility and credibility, creating a culture of professional journalism, developing capacity rather than dependency, building from the bottom up rather than top down, supporting diverse media voices and formats, addressing media corruption, and establishing a long-term development commitment to the media.

Flexibility

Conditions differ from country to country and time to time. Thus, participants emphasized, no precise criteria for media assistance can be identified in advance. Countries with few or no independent media may need media assistance the most.

Because media sometimes work as a wedge to open society, openness should not be a precondition to aid, one development expert noted. Under the right circumstances, NGO media aid can help build debate, accountability, and change from within a country. Therefore, the international community should respond to local initiatives, judging each case on its own merits. "There are situations where we should be helping dissident voices, and the governments may not be ready for reform. We have to

be careful about setting up standards ahead of time. The NGOs and dissidents need support before it reaches the government level."

The U.S. model of "objective" professional media is more viable in some countries than in others. Plurality of voices may be a better criteria for judging development success. One participant noted that we forget our own history when we insist on neutral media independent of all political partisanship: "So-called independent media simply meant independent from government. [The U.S. media] was controlled by political parties and other interests in this country for over 200 years."

Good programs also offer a flexible toolbox of media assistance (such as in-country training, international visits, professional associations, codevelopment of programming, and legal aid) that can be used to respond to changes that occur in the media and cultural environment as the program evolves.

Credibility

It is essential, participants stressed, to protect the credibility of the indigenous media being assisted. This means that the media's editorial independence must be respected: "If you're not practicing what you're preaching, it's not going to ring true." We are exporting our values, not our messages, a participant noted. It will compromise the program if the media being assisted are seen as the pawns of the U.S. Government.

It is important that U.S. Government motives for the support be understood. A large transfer of money "could be the kiss of death." To help ensure credibility both for the media assisted and those providing the help, the standards for winning support for delivery of aid and training must be transparent.

Creating a Culture of Professional Journalism

The best media assistance programs link journalists to each other, creating a culture and community of independent professional journalism and preventing the problem of "kingmaker" programs, which may be criticized when they favor one media outlet over a competitor. To create a professional culture, participants emphasized that trainers must reflect on lessons learned and adapt to local conditions. "The trained need to become trainers. Followup linkages need to be made." In Latin America, one program did not adequately track the journalists to see what they produced following the training, a participant said. The first generation of training was not very successful, because it "looked only at the American model," but the second was better because it "shaped the training to [the journalists'] own perceived needs."

The enabling environment for independent, professional, public-spirited media is a critical part of media development. One media development veteran concluded "If we are not working for changes in media laws…[and] for civil society, then mere training may satisfy ourselves that we are doing good work, but it is not enough."

Developing Capacity, Not Dependency

The best aid promotes indigenous capacity rather than dependency. "The goal should be injection of support early, to build an organization that doesn't need us." While this is difficult in conflict settings, in more conducive environments this goal builds local respect for the media and the assistance organization.

Building from the Bottom Up

The best assistance is generated by local partners, who take the lead in defining their needs and invite the assistance organization to come in. The role of the international community is to help enlarge the space in which these media outlets operate. "We don't run the show; they run the show. We are in the background, helping in the form of grants and training," one media assistance practitioner said.

It is important to work from the beginning with local people or institutions that have the respect of their peers. Arriving with a transparent set of best practices and principles (fairness, accuracy, truth, context, devotion to the reader, independence) helps generate appropriate partners in the field, one NGO participant said.

Diverse Media Voices and Formats

The best programs, participants stressed, include a plurality of media outlets and of voices (including women and minorities) within each media outlet. This gives those who were previously marginalized a voice and helps prevent conflicts. It also fosters a variety of perspectives and a genuine debate in the society. "Hate media" and propaganda are less powerful if there are also credible perspectives in play.

It is important to include rural as well as urban media strategies in the program.

In some countries, it may be smart to offer cross-training for multiple media formats—print, television, radio, and internet—rather than segregating programs by print, broadcast, and internet media. Professional journalistic values and ethics are consistent across all different media technologies.

Addressing Media Corruption

The best programs address the issue of corruption within the media. Sometimes professional media standards are thwarted by the low pay provided to reporters, who then resort openly to bribes. Building journalistic culture through journalism associations and more professional training can help upgrade the entire profession over time. One of the successes of USAID's Center for Latin American Journalism (CELAP) project in Panama in the 1990s, for example, was removing the "bribe board" in each newsroom, which showed who owed journalists what for each story.

Long-Term Donor Commitment

One of the key lessons from media assistance experience is that most media development in vulnerable, developing, and postconflict societies is effective only over many years. Although assistance to media in conflict zones may need to be initiated quickly and be limited in scope, participants agreed that sustained commitments are necessary to achieve lasting results. One grantee said he would rather have less money over a longer time than the larger lump sums that are commonly granted now for shorter periods.

One USAID veteran said it is unrealistic to expect U.S. donors to make a sustained commitment to developing a professional independent media sector. "We [in the U.S. Government] are susceptible to reductions in funding and changes in priority." For this reason, he emphasized, media assistance practitioners need to have a plan from the outset—a strategy designed for the country in question—for creating the independent media sector. But another media development expert contended that such comprehensive planning wasn't feasible. "We have to get real about this," he said. "If you go into a country with its economy in collapse, no advertising, to put in a plan for an exit strategy makes no sense. You have to admit that it is a 10-year plus process to get this on its feet. Let's at least all recognize that it takes that long and there are no miracle ways to do this."

Participants agreed that committing to long-term aid does not necessarily mean sustaining dependent media outlets that could otherwise be developing their own independent economic base. Even in areas where economic independence is not yet possible, long-term assistance can be effective in creating a culture of professional, open, and independent media through flexible grants, training, legal support, development of journalism associations, and other enabling factors. Assistance should evolve over time in response to the changing situation, with a variety of tools and methods.

Annex: Participants

Christa Capozzola
Department of State

Christina Dahlman
UNESCO

John Fox
Independent Consultant

Joan Goodin
Management Systems
International, Inc.

Peter Graves
USAID

Chad W. Hespell
Management Systems
International, Inc.

David Hoffman
Internews Network

Ann C. Hudock
World Learning

Ellen Hume
Journalist

Jason Hunter
Management Systems
International

Jerry Hyman
USAID

Assia Ivantcheva
USAID

Karin Deutsch Karlekar
Freedom House

Krishna Kumar
USAID

Mark Lagon

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations
Committee

John Langlois
USAID

Jamie Metzl
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations
Committee

Susan Middlestadt
Academy for Educational
Development

Rebecca Milner
International Center for
Journalists

Angela Morgenstern
Media Consultant

Woody Navin
USAID

Eric Newton
Knight Foundation

Bethany Davis Noll
Programme in Comparative
Media Law and Policy

Herman Obermayer
Media Consultant

Maurice Perkins
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations
Committee

Mark Pomar
IREX Mary Ann Riegelman
USAID

Rick Rockwell
American University

Bill Siemering
Open Society Institute

John Simon
USAID

Steve Sposato
USAID

Leo Surla
MetaMetrics

Barbara Turner
USAID

Karen Volker
Department of State

Cornelius Walsh
Department of State

Neal Walsh
State Department

Nancy Ward
Independent Journalism
Foundation

Mark Whitehouse
IREX

This Evaluation Working Paper can be ordered from USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). To download or order publications, go to www.dec.org and enter the document identification number in the search box. The DEC may also be contacted at 8403 Colesville Rd, Ste 210, Silver Spring, MD 20910; tel 301-562-0641; fax 301-588-7787; email docorder@dec.cdie.org.

Editorial, design, and production assistance was provided by IBI-International Business Initiatives, Arlington, VA, under contract no. HFM-C-00-01-00143-00. For more information, contact IBI's Publications and Graphics Support Project at 703-525-2277 or mail@ibi-usa.com.

For more information, contact
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C. 20523-1000
Telephone: 202-712-4810
Internet: www.usaid.gov

PN-ACR-754